The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington. D.C. 20505

8 June 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Constantine Menges
Special Assistant to the President
and Senior Director for Latin American Affairs

SUBJECT: Semantics and Structure of Disinformation

I have been thinking about addressing as a foreign intelligence subject how our adversaries succeed in using words, verbal formulations and concepts as a weapon to damage Western interests around the world. At this stage I am groping around for a way to get some concentrated brain power, high level policy attention and possible public attention paid to this subject -- perhaps a small analytical group, perhaps a conference, perhaps a research program.

To give you a broader picture of what I'm after I enclose a copy of a letter I received from Leo Cherne on this subject in my search for ideas on how to approach it.

I would like your ideas and would like to talk to you about this.

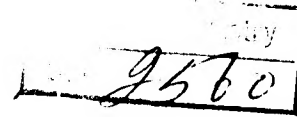William J. Casey

Enclosure:
As stated

*Lio Cherne*

**? JUN 1984**

*Executive Director*
*The Research Institute of America, Inc*
*589 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017*

June 1, 1984

The Honorable William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear Bill:

A very quick answer to the question you put to Gene Rostow - "why are we so weak on semantics and the structure of disinformation?" - would require an immediate realization that it has been a chronic failure of the American people, at least during the last fifty years, that we are extremely weak on languages, not the least of which is our own.

I have always been appalled by any comparison between ourselves and the British in this respect. Even our major literary figures in this century have achieved their eminence not through their mastery of the language, but through the mastery of their style and story-telling artistic invention.

While not a student of American literature, my impression is that this was not the case during the nineteenth century and into the very early years of this century. As we have become the world's masters of the visual communicating arts, our language has deteriorated further, and even those from whom we learn language usage on radio and television will, in at least eight out of ten instances, make the wrong choice when they have to decide which word is proper in a particular sentence -- me or myself.

Even more distressing is that with semantics or the science and study of semantics, with very few exceptions the field is dominated by the extreme left wing. If I am not mistaken, the most honored student and teacher of linguistics is Noam Chomsky. He is so far left, there is no room to the left of him. (His entry in "Who's Who" is quite striking).

If I were you I would put the same question you put to Gene Rostow to _____ He is one of only three gifted people I can think of who has paid any serious attention to language.

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Hon. William J. Casey                    June 1, 1984

from NBC, and the third within a much wider context                    STAT

For reasons I don't quite understand the left has long dominated
both the concern with and practice of language.  For example,
comparing the "New York Review of Books" with The New York
Times Book Review finds The New York Times pedestrian, though it is
hardly an example of conservatives at work.

The individual you were trying to recall                    The          STAT
work you recall that was done with respect to Hitler in the mid-
thirties was essentially not on semantics but on propaganda.

When I next talk to                    I will try to find out from       STAT
him who it was who headed up what I recall to have been the
"Institute of Propaganda Studies" which was totally focused on an
analysis of pro-Nazi propaganda.  This leads me to another suggges-      STAT
tion.  Write the same letter to                    .  He has always been enormously    STAT
preoccupied with linguistics, semantics and rhetoric, and has a
bottomless memory.  There is the additional advantage that he is as
anti-communist as Noam Chomsky is pro.

Because of your letter I watched a PBS program last weekend on
Media and Language in the hope that it would provide some useful
leads.  It was garbage.

I don't know if I have answered your question.  It is a crucially
important one.

                                        Cordially,

                                        Leo Cherne

LC/cl